

The Wilmington violence held far-reaching implications for blacks nationwide. The response of national black leaders such as Fortune and Washington was split between radical and conservative elements. The division, largely one of personal philosophy among black intellectuals, but it was also a boon to whites who sought to divide black opinion. A good example can be found in the *Washington Post* where Fortune was cast as an anti-Booker T. Washington radical and was misquoted. Fortune apologized to Washington, with whom he had a close relationship, about the *Post* interview, realizing that white newspapermen were sometimes less than honorable in their intentions.⁴³ The divide between black activists and intellectuals continued for years and reduced cohesion among black leadership.⁴⁴ Still, black

leaders across the country united in advocating better treatment of blacks in the South—"we deplore the sad and barbarous incident at Wilmington, N. C. which has blacked the fair name of the Old North State."⁴⁵

When local and national efforts failed to relieve pressures exerted by Democrats, Wilmington blacks left the city. The exodus continued into December, with the newspapers reporting that over 1,000 blacks had left since the violence in November. Reports said that many bought railroad tickets to points north of Richmond and south to South Carolina and Georgia, while others moved to rural New Hanover and surrounding counties. White men who depended upon rental income from black tenants saw a n immediate drop in revenue, particularly in the Brooklyn neighborhood. The paper sought to put a positive spin on the article by observing that many whites were filtering into the city to replace the lost black population. The editor surmised that as many as 250 to 300 whites had arrived recently in the city from other counties and that those new arrivals were filling the rental houses and searching for jobs "of all classes" vacated by blacks.⁴⁶

Democrats Practice Damage Control

Wilmington Democrats sought in every way possible to counter the claims made by blacks nationwide. Alfred Moore Waddell's narrative in *Collier's Weekly*, published on November 26, 1898, became the standing story—whites performed an act of revolution to wrench the city from the

⁴³ Timothy T. Fortune to Booker T. Washington, November 30, 1898, as quoted in Harlan, *Booker T. Washington Papers*, 4:523-4.

⁴⁴In a December 1898, article in the *Wilmington Messenger*, a black editor of the Africo-American Presbyterian in Charlotte "rakes" Booker T. Washington and "the able men of the black race who are in sympathy with that wise man" in an article. Another foreboding observation about the Charlotte editor is that the white press noted that he wrote "pacifically in places but the general tone leaves the impression of sore-headedness and growling," indicating that whites were paying close attention to black press and the tone of its product. In January 1899, Booker T. Washington was informed by Edward Clement, one of his white supporters in Massachusetts, that opposition to Washington's methods was growing among blacks. Clement told Washington that he was "impressed with the protests of such men as Dubois and Dunbar against the new outburst of intolerance in the South." Fortune's meetings, plus the networks established by men such as Washington and Dubois, provided the groundwork for what would eventually lead to the formation of other organizations such as the Urban League and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in the twentieth century. Edward Clement to Booker T. Washington, January 2, 1899, as quoted in Harlan, *Booker T. Washington Papers*, 5:5; *Wilmington Messenger*, December 23, 1898.

⁴⁵ The Afro-American Council and several conferences of the African American Methodist Episcopal Zion Church met in the spring of 1899 and issued proclamations and memorials denouncing the violence. *Wilmington Messenger*, May 16, 1899, *Morning Star* (Wilmington), May 5, 1899.

⁴⁶ *Wilmington Messenger*, December 6, 1898.